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FIFTH COMMITTEE
30th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 22 November 1995
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VILCHEZ ASHER (Nicaragua)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 121: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM (continued) (A/50/30; A/C.5/50/5, A/C.5/50/11, A/C.5/50/23, A/C.5/50/24 and Corr.1 and A/C.5/50/29)

1. Mr. DESAI (India) said that there was some justification to the argument that the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) should improve its effectiveness at a time of restructuring throughout the United Nations system. In that regard his delegation welcomed the measures taken by ICSC to promote transparency of its working methods, and looked forward in particular to the establishment of a consultative process with organizations and staff representatives on the agenda of the Commission. ICSC should also hold shorter sessions in the light of the need for the more effective utilization of available resources.

2. Other proposals had been made on restructuring ICSC, either by calling for some of its members to be elected by organizations and staff, or by seeking to establish a tripartite mechanism of Member States, organizations and staff. In addition to altering the very nature of the Commission, such a restructuring would detract from the independence and impartiality enjoined on the Commission under article 6 of its statute. The Commission could function best when it was composed of elected representatives drawn from the entire membership of the Organization but acting in their individual capacities, as was currently the case.

3. On the substantive aspects of the ICSC report (A/50/30) his delegation concurred with those that said that the Noblemaire principle was relevant only to the extent that it helped to determine whether current United Nations salary scales remained competitive. Thus, it was futile to seek to systematically identify the best paid civil service, since that would lead to endless revisions and confusion. United States civil service salaries were still, broadly speaking, among the best, and his delegation supported the continuation of the current system, albeit with some adjustments. ICSC should continue to look at other civil service salary structures periodically to ensure that the gap between the United Nations salary structure and that of the highest paid civil services remained reasonable; if the gap became too wide, the Commission should bring that to the attention of Member States.

4. The real question was whether the salaries offered by the organizations of the common system were enough to attract the right kind of people. The Secretary-General had unequivocally stated that the organizations of the United Nations common system were no longer competitive in relation to other international organizations, a view shared by the Commission. ICSC had suggested a revised methodology for the determination of common system salary scales on the basis of the United States federal civil service. While his delegation would welcome some clarification of the reasons, particularly technical, for the proposed changes, it supported the Commission's recommendation, already endorsed by the Secretary-General, for a 9.2 per cent net increase in remuneration during the biennium 1996-1997.

5. On the whole India was sympathetic to an increase in salaries, notwithstanding the constraints imposed by the financial crisis. The financial implications of such a measure would be $38.8 million for the biennium 1996-1997, which was a reasonable cost to pay for ensuring that the staff of the United Nations continued to meet the standards enshrined in Article 101 of the United Nations Charter. Indeed, improved productivity could only be ensured if the deterioration in conditions of service was reversed. In that regard it was necessary for Member States to first resolve to provide the Organization with the necessary additional funds, since it could not meet additional commitments from existing resources.

6. Mr. ATIYANTO (Indonesia) said that his delegation attached the greatest importance to the need to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization so that it could better undertake its functions. In that connection, as emphasized by the Secretary-General, the absolute priority must be to endow the Organization with the human and financial resources it needed to carry out the tasks entrusted to it. At the same time, the unity of the common system must be maintained. Lastly, for the Organization to perform effectively, it must be able to recruit and retain highly qualified staff, while respecting the principle of equitable geographical distribution. His delegation would continue to support all initiatives aimed at meeting those three imperatives.

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7. Mr. MENKVELD (Netherlands) recalled that it had been decided that the Committee would not hold a formal meeting when there were fewer than eight speakers on the list. That rule should be respected.

8. Mr. ACAKPO-SATCHIVI (Secretary of the Committee) said that it was not a question of failing to apply that rule, but rather of making the best use of the conference services available to the Fifth Committee. Informal consultations had been scheduled following the conclusion of the formal meeting, in view of which, rather than defer statements by the speakers inscribed to a later meeting, the Secretariat had thought it useful to hold the formal meeting. In that connection delegations could facilitate the work of the Committee by not waiting until the end of the debate on an item before inscribing their names in the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.